

Maine East Helps Diagnose Student's Leukemia; Blood Drive Friday, Saturday

Peter Fox graduated with honors; chemo will force a delay in starting college, but he plans a career as an Air Force officer.

- By [Tim Spadoni](#)
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IL Wing Cadet Peter Fox

Photo Credit [Pam DeFiglio](#)

Peter Fox graduated from Maine East High School on time despite chemotherapy for leukemia. He's at Advocate Lutheran General Hospital, and can see the carnival, where a blood drive in his honor is taking place, from a window.

In March, Peter Fox, 18, feeling faint and fatigued, stopped by Maine East High School's health center for a check up.

A test showed trouble: the student's red and white blood cell counts were unusually low. Peter walked out the door with instructions to seek further tests and a blood transfusion, and learned within the week he was suffering from early stage leukemia.

Since then, he's gone through grueling chemotherapy, and will have to delay starting college, but the early detection means Peter has good chances for recovery--and he's set definite career goals as an Air Force officer.

His father is grateful to the school's resource-rich clinic, which is staffed with three rotating doctors, a nurse and a lab. They made it possible for Peter, who belongs to a civilian auxiliary branch of the Air Force, to be able to pursue his goals.

"The [Maine East Health Center](#) was key to catching the leukemia early," said John Fox, Peter's father. "If it hadn't been for the quality of that organization, who knows how long it would have gone on before we discovered that Peter was ill."

Graduated with honors

Despite spending most of his time since March under chemotherapy treatment, Peter was able to finish his studies at Maine East, go to the prom, graduate with honors and participate in the end of school activities.

"Tim Cook was my case coordinator," said Peter, "and we can't thank him enough for all he has done for me and my family. ...He did far more than what he really needed to do for me. He came over every other day, helped me with school work, administered tests and was there for us whenever we needed to talk."

Cook helped set up a web cam on Peter's laptop so he could participate in English class.

"I could see them and they could see me right from my hospital bed," Peter said. "I felt I was still in class."

Blood drive Friday and Saturday at Maine East carnival

Maine East has held a number of fundraisers for Peter, for which the Fox family is grateful.

One was at Baker's Square, and another was a silent auction of painted violins and cellos, held after a student concert.

On Friday and Saturday, the school's Athletic Booster Club is sponsoring a blood drive and bone marrow transplant registration program in Peter's honor during its [Inaugural Summer Carnival](#) located at Maine East High School, 2601 W. Dempster in Park Ridge.

Peter, who is currently a patient at Advocate Lutheran General Hospital in Park Ridge, immediately east of the school, can see the carnival from a hospital window. He's waiting to see if doctors will let him attend the carnival this weekend.

Bone marrow transplants

With Peter's early diagnosis and subsequent treatment, he is expected to recover without a bone marrow transplant. However, many others are still desperate for a transplant.

"I'd like everyone to be aware of the need that people have for blood when they get these illnesses," said John Fox. "You don't really know the stress, trauma and the financial hardships that are incurred because of an illness until it happens in your family."

Peter's next round of chemotherapy begins in August. Due to the timing of the treatment, Peter will not attend Southern Illinois University in the fall as planned, but will wait until the spring semester to begin his college career.

"Peter's been always positive and has accepted that this is the way it's going to be," said John Fox.

Though Peter may not be taking classes, he plans to work in the classroom as a teacher's assistant in the Maine East Athletic Department. He will help teach the Survival Swim class, which is a student requirement for graduation.

90 percent cure rate

With a 90 percent cure rate for children under 21 with this stage leukemia, John Fox say his family is very hopeful that Peter will make a full recovery.

Once Peter begins college he will enter the Air Force ROTC program and, after graduation, plans to begin a career as an Air Force officer.

Peter will also maintain his membership in the [Civil Air Patrol](#), the civilian auxiliary branch of the Air Force. According to Peter, "The Civil Air Patrol teaches leadership, offers aerospace education and provides emergency services. I plan on staying in the Patrol in college, during my time with the Air Force and then, for the rest of my life."

Dave Beery, Maine Township High School District 207's director of communications, acknowledged the school--especially the health center-- played a role in helping Peter move on to his future.

"The Student Health Center is a terrific resource for our students, and its ability to provide service goes beyond the norm for a high school health office," Beery said.

"Peter's situation is more dramatic than most, but it is not unusual to help students in a serious situation with diagnoses that might otherwise have taken a much longer time."

Source: mortongrove.patch.com